

THE GATE OF PEACE

BY BLISS CARMAN

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PROLOGUE.

Go forth, my soul, into the mighty East,
Where the vast spirit of the race still broods
On elemental and eternal things,
And the deep mind in lands of morning calm
Still meditates in mystery, and dreams
Of what concerns its welfare and its peace.

And from that far abode of truth bring home
Some artistry of wisdom and of faith,
Some revelation or forgotten creed,
Some flower of ancient culture flung away
And lost long since, discarded in the spoil
Of conquerors, or trampled under foot
By teeming generations on the march.

For yet beyond our last meridian,
Beyond the night, where primal dawn begins
And the great sun gets up in scarlet gold,
The mystic blossom of perfection still
Must bloom somewhere to gladden mortal eyes.
Perhaps within some temple garden dim,
Where Buddha sits and smiles in tranquil bronze,
Watching the slow process of the days
Go by him like a pageant of wet rain,
Some wise old priest tends it with loving care,
Among his white and purple irises,
Shedding their beauty on the quiet world.

There with a patient and benignant regard
Born of his toil, his flowers, and his dreams,
He cultivates that pure philosophy,

Like a rare output of the soul, which time,
Whatever it may take, must leave unharmed.
Or haply the immortal seed yet springs
In unregarded loveliness beside
Some great highway where many pilgrims go,
Seeking the truth, confused within a maze
Of myth and superstition and dead form.

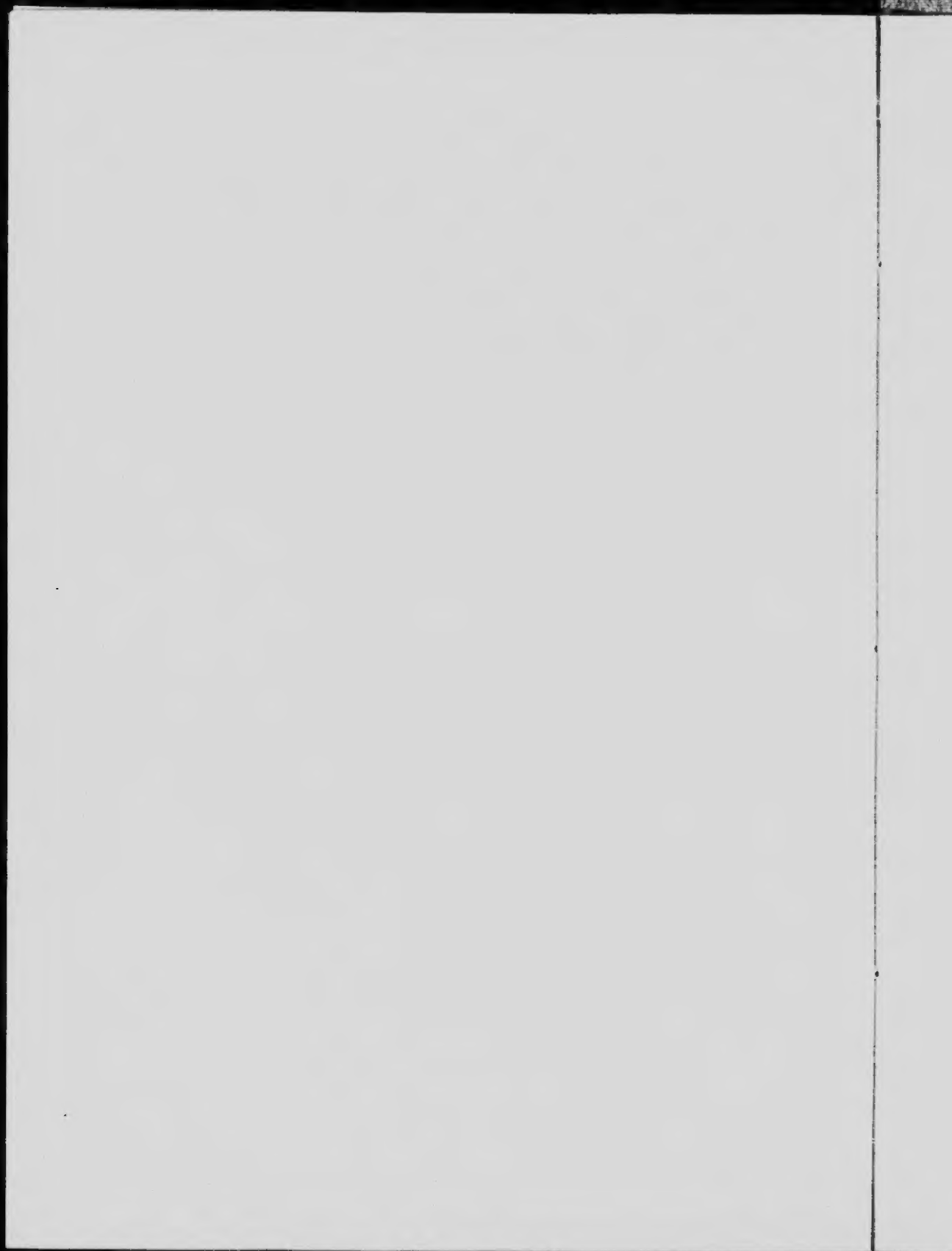
Go forth, my soul, on this adventure brave,
Find this old shadowy garden filled with awe,
Or the great common road, within whose dust
Still blows the flower of peace, and bring it home
To grow within our new-made dooryards here,
Among the roses and the oranges
Between the high Sierras and the sea.
Yet fear not empty-handed to return,
And underneath these azure skies evolve
Out of thy native ground some later creed,
Some teaching not revealed in ancient lore,
Some goodness yet undreamed of, all our own.

This was the hope I pondered, as I went
Along the San Francisco water-front,
To say farewell to a departing friend
For the mysterious Orient outward bound.
The magic East,--China, Japan, Malay,
Saigon, Osaka, Singapore, Hong Kong,
Burmah and India and the tropic seas !
The names rang in my ear, and while I mused
The smell of the East was in my nostrils, rank,
Subtle, suggestive, human,--earth and fire.
The sidewalks, wharves, and warehouses were piled
With far-brought crates and foreign-looking bales,
Sea-chests and boxes of outlandish make,
Spices and fruits and merchandise ; the docks
Swarming with dark-skinned men, Kanaka, Jap,
And Chinese coolies round their bowls of rice,
Among the coils of rope and capstan bars.

And then the high black liner from her dock
Began to move; the cast-off hawsers splashed;
The parting yawned; a brave hand was flung up
Giving the sign of friendship and farewell;
Slowly the great hull swung out in the stream,
Turned on the tide full-freighted, forged ahead,
The band on board playing a cheery march,
The harbor gulls dipping about her stern,
As she passed down behind the anchored ships,
And with a flutter of handkerchiefs was gone.

Out through the Golden Gate, where Tamalpais
Looks down on the blue waters of the Bay,
Bathed in the air of a perpetual spring,--
The sunlit sorcery of an earlier world;
Out where the Farallones in purple mist
Loom on the sea-line, and the fishing fleets
Go skimming with their brown sails in the sun;
Out where the tramps and trading schooners ply
To Yokohama, Sydney, and Rangoon,
Or hot Tahiti and the island ports,
And trailing smoke the punctual mail boats go;
Out by the dancing sun-path on the sea,
My friend went forth upon the world-wide quest.

Months later, where Columbus from his tall
White marble column by the Park looks down
And sees below him half Manhattan pass,
And round his base the tide of traffic swirl,
Ebbing and murmuring, as the long Spring dusks
Light him with golden splendor calm on calm;
With tales of travel, incidents recalled,
Treasures exhibited and scenes portrayed,--
The happy wanderer's talk on coming home,--
I heard this legend of India retold.



THE GATE OF PEACE.

Ah, who will build the city of our dream,
Where beauty shall abound and truth avail,
With patient love that is too wise for strife,
Blending in power as gentle as the rain
With the reviving earth on full spring days ?
Who now will speed us to its gate of peace,
And reassure us on our doubtful road ?

Three centuries ago a fearless man,
Yearning to set his people in the way,
Threw all his royal might into a plan
To found an ideal city that should give
Freedom to every instinct for the best,
From humblest impulse in his own domain
To rumored wisdom from the world's far ends.
Strengthened with ardor from a high resolve,
Beneath the patient smile of Indian skies
This fair dream flourished for a score of years,
Until the blight of evil touched its bloom
With fading, and transformed its vivid life
Into a ghost-flower of its fair design.

Now ruined nursery tower and gay boudoir,
A sad custodian of sacred tombs,
And scattered feathers from the purple wings
Of doves who reign in undisputed calm
Over this Eden of hope and fair essay,
Recall the valor of this ancient quest.

Great Akbar,--grandfather of Shah Jehan,
The artist Emperor of India

Who built the Taj for love of one held dear
Beyond all other women in the world,
And left that loveliest memorial,
The most supreme of wonders wrought by man,
To move for very joy all hearts to tears
Beholding how great beauty springs from love,--
Akbar the wisest ruler over Ind,
Grandson of Babar in whose veins were mixed
The blood of Tamerlane and Chinghiz Khan,
Who beat the Afghans and the Rajputs down
At Paniput and Buxar in Bengal,
Making himself the lord of Hindustan,
And with his restless Tartars founded there
The Mogul empire with its Moslem faith,
Its joyousness, enlightenment, and art,--
Akbar of all the sovereigns of the East
Is still most deeply loved and gladly praised.

For he who conquered with so strong a hand
Cabul, Kashmir, and Kandahar, and Sind,
Oudh and Orissa, Chitor and Ajmir,
With all their wealth to weld them into one,
Upholding justice with his sovereignty
Throughout his borders and imposing peace,
Was first and last a seeker after truth.
No craven unlaborious truce he sought,
But that great peace which only comes with light,
Emerging after chaos has been quelled
In some long struggle of enduring will,
To be a proof of order and of law,
Which cannot rest on falsehood nor on wrong,
But spreads like generous sunshine on the earth
When goodness has been gained and truth made clear,
At whatsoe'er incalculable cost.

Returning once with his victorious arms
And war-worn companies on the homeward march
To Agra and his court's magnificence,

From a campaign against some turbulent folk,
He came at evening to a quiet place
Near Sikri by the roadside through the woods,
Where there were many doves among the trees.

There Salim Chisti a holy man had made
His lonely dwelling in the wilderness,
Seeking perfection. And the solitude
Was sweet to Akbar, and he halted there
And went to Salim in his lodge and said,
"O man and brother, thy long days are spent
In meditation, seeking for the path
Through this great world's impediments to peace,
Here in the twilight with the holy stars
Or when the rose of morning breaks in gold ;
Tell me, I pray, whence comes the gift of peace
With all its blessings for a people's need,
And how may true tranquility be found
On which man's restless spirit longs to rest ?"

And Salim answered, "Lord, most readily
In Allah's out-of-doors, for there men live
More truly, being free from false constraint,
For learning wisdom with a calmer mind.
For they who would find peace must conquer fear
And ignorance and greed,--the ravagers
Of spirit, mind, and sense,--and learn to live
Content beneath the shade of Allah's hand.
Who worships not his own will shall find peace."

Then Akbar answered, "I have set my heart
On making beauty, truth, and justice shine
As the ordered stars above the darkened earth.
Are not these also things to be desired,
And striven for with no uncertain toil ?
And save thro' them whence comes the gift of peace?"

Then Salim smiled, and with his finger drew
In the soft dust before his door, and said,
"O king, thy words are true, thy heart most wise.
Thou also shalt find peace, as Allah wills,
Through following bravely what to thee seems best.
When any question, 'What is peace?' reply,
'The shelter of the Gate of Paradise,
The shadow of the archway, not the arch,
Within whose shade at need the poor may rest,
The weary be refreshed, the weak secure,
And all men pause to gladden as they go.' "

And Akbar pondered Salim Chisti's words.
Then turning to his ministers, he said,
"Here will I build my capital, and here
The world shall come unto a council hall,
And in a place of peace pursue the quest
Of wisdom and the finding out of truth,
That there be no more discord upon earth,
But only knowledge, beauty, and good will."

And it was done according to Akbar's word.
There in the wilderness as by magic rose
Futtehpur Sikri, the victorious city,
Of marble and red sandstone among the trees,
A rose unfolding in the kindling dawn.
Palace and Mosque and garden and serai,
Bazaars and baths and spacious pleasure grounds,
By favor of Allah to perfection sprang.

Thus Akbar wrought to make his dream come true.
From the four corners of the world he brought
His master workmen, from Iran and Ind,
From wild Mongolia and the Arabian wastes;
Masons from Baghdad, Delhi, and Multan;
Dome builders from the North, from Samarkand;
Cunning mosaic workers from Kanauj;

And carvers of inscriptions from Shiraz;
And they all labored with endearing skill,
Each at his handcraft, to make beauty be.

When the first ax-blade on the timber rang,
The timid doves, as if foreboding ill,
Had fled from Sikri and its quiet groves.

But as he promised, Akbar sent and bade
The wise men of all nations to his court,
Brahman and Christian, Buddhist and Parsee,
Jain and stiff Mohammedan and Jew,
All followers of the One with many names,
Bringing the ghostly wisdom of the earth.

And so they came of every hue and creed.
From the twelve winds of heaven their caravans
Drew in to Sikri as Akbar summoned them,
To spend long afternoons in council grave,
Sifting tradition for the seed of truth,
In the great mosque in Futtehpur at peace.
And Salim Chisti lived his holy life,
Beloved and honored there as Akbar's friend.

But light and changeable are the hearts of men.
Soon in that city dedicate to peace
Disseensions spread and rivalries grew rife,
Envy and bitterness and strife returned
Once more, and truth before them fled away.

Then Salim Chisti, coming to Akbar spoke,
"Lord, give thy servant leave now to depart
And follow where the fluttered wings have gone,
For here there is no longer any peace,
And truth cannot prevail where discord dwells."

"Nay then," said Akbar, "'tis not thou but I
Who am the servant here and must go hence.
I found thee master of this solitude,
Lord of the principedom of a quiet mind,
A sovereign vested in tranquility,
And I have done thee wrong and stayed thy feet
From following perfection, with my horde
Of turbulent malcontents; and my loved dream
To build a city of abiding peace
Was but a vain illusion. Therefore now
This foolish people shall be driven forth
From this fair place, to live as they may choose
In disputance and wrangling longer still,
Until they learn, if Allah wills it so,
To lay aside their folly for the truth."

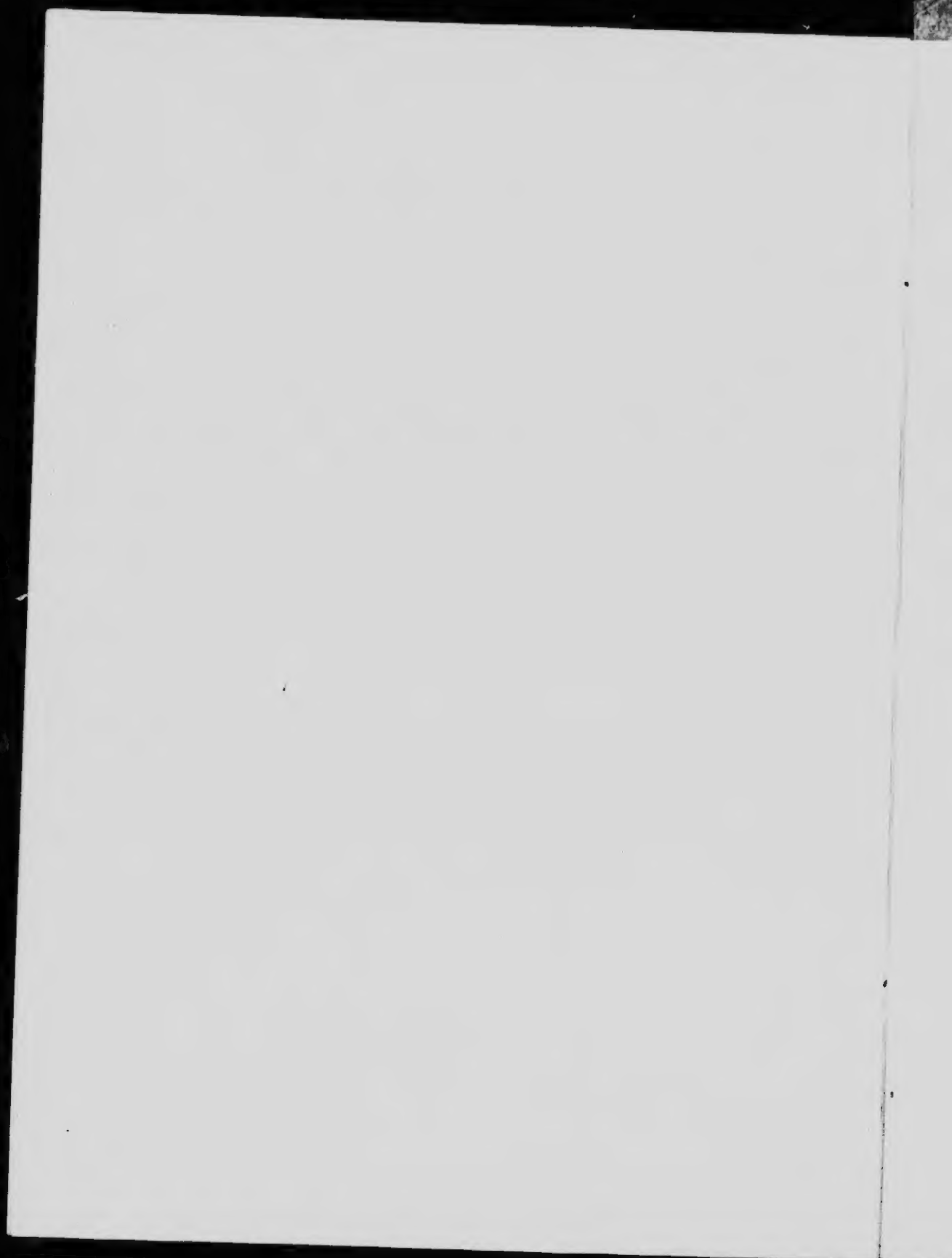
And as the king commanded, so it was.
More quickly than he came, with all his court
And hosts of followers he went away,
Leaving the place to solitude once more,--
A rose to wither where it once had blown.

To-day the all-kind unpolluted sun
Shines through the marble fret-work with no sound;
The winds play hide and seek through corridors
Where stately women with dark glowing eyes
Have laughed and frolicked in their fluttering robes;
The rose leaves drop with none to gather them,
In gardens where no footfall comes with eve,
Nor any lovers watch the rising moon;
And ancient silence, truer than all speech,
Still holds the secrets of the Council Hall,
Upon whose walls frescoes of many faiths
Attest the courtesy of open minds.

Before the last camp-follower was gone,
The doves returned and took up their abode
In the main gate of those deserted walls.

And in their custody this " Gate of Peace "
Bears still the grandeur of its origin,
Firing anew the wistful hearts of men
To brave endeavor with replenished hope,
Though since that time three hundred years ago,
The magic hush of those forsaken streets
And empty courtyards has been undisturbed.
Save by the gentle whirring of grey wings,
With cooing murmurs uttered all day long,
And reverent tread of those from near and far,
Who still pursue the immemorial quest.





EPILOGUE.

This grey-blue feather with its silver clasp,
Mounted by Liberty in London, see!
Gleaming in the white sunlight on the ground
Beside the Gate of Peace in Futtchpur,
Our friend picked up these trophies of her quest
And brought them home for gifts, as signs and seals
Of far-winged comradeship.

O gentle friends,
You who know much now of the search for peace,
And in the difficult art of life have learned
How beauty is the fittest guise of good,
And good the utmost truth, what signify
Our keepsakes from the ancient brooding East?
A mystic fleck from inspiration's wing,
A little modern skill to hold it fast,
With best of all a loving heart's warm care
That linked them thus as emblems of its faith,
Wherein, whoever seeks the Gate of Peace,
Content to travel by the happy signs
On Allah's highway through this modern world,
May find it through the code of loyalty
To wisdom, joy, and blessed loveliness.

Another gate of peace, of threefold make,
Prologue and tale and epilogue, is here
Set up for fellow farers on the road,
Inscribed with grateful heart to M. P. K.

The first edition of *The Gate of Peace*, of one hundred and twelve copies, printed at The Village Press in 1907, was almost entirely destroyed by fire before it could be distributed. In the present edition, of sixty copies, printed by John E. Hersam, at New Canaan, Connecticut, in April, 1909, a prologue and an epilogue have been added.

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